

Belmont Human Rights Commission  
Belmont Town Hall  
January 4, 2007

## Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Janet Cudmore-Boswell, Laurie Graham, Cheryl Morrissey, Judie Feins, Lisa Bernt, Fran Yuan (Chair)

Members Absent: Cynthia Bannon, Rosalind Kabrhel, Donna Ruvolo, Moez Rawji, Connie Williams

Guests and Liaisons Present: Hildy Dvorak (Council on Aging), Lt. Peter Hoerr (Belmont Police Department), Paul Solomon (Board of Selectmen), Mary Keenan (Friends of the Library), Kathryn Bonfiglio (BAR)

Guest Speaker: Nan Donald (see item 12)

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.
2. Phone Line for receiving complaints: Janet will cover the BHRC phone for the month of January, and Cheryl will do it (again) for February.
3. HRC Brochure: There was a discussion of updating the brochure to reflect recent activities, and the addition of an invitation to join the Commission's contact list. Copies will be printed in time for the Martin Luther King breakfast on January 15.
4. Funding: For the concert and the mailing, as we try to raise some additional funds, checks can be made out to the Town of Belmont. Tom Younger (Town Administrator) and Barbara Hagg (Town Accountant) have agreed to handle such funds for the HRC. (A Gift Fund arrangement will be used.) The Town then writes checks, as needed, to reimburse expenses.
5. Insert for June light bill: We have booked the June slot for an insert in the Belmont Electric Light bills. What do we want to insert? The brochure is a possibility, but we should consider alternatives, too. The limit is one page.
6. Martin Luther King breakfast: Volunteers are still needed to pick up food. All HRC members are urged to attend.
7. Commission meeting format: There was a brief discussion of how meetings could proceed better, based on some concerns from the December meeting. In order to leave more time for discussion, especially after guest speakers, the following should guide the meetings:
  - " Members need to read the minutes in advance of the meetings; this is why the chair distributes them. This will save 6-7 minutes at the least.
  - " Members need to take turns speaking.
  - " We need to do more work in subcommittees, with the fruits of these efforts coming to the main group (rather than spending meeting time doing this work).
8. Mediation training: What have other MAHRC member organizations done in this area? What kind of training would be most useful for us? Laurie will ask at the next MAHRC meeting. Also, Janet is meeting with the Cambridge HRC next week and will learn about their mediation efforts (including training), as well as their suggestions for grant sources. Fran will also check the state AG's office for mediation training. Lisa indicated that the MCAD had a program, but it might not be our first choice. There is a lot of variation in training approach and quality.
  - Lt. Hoerr noted that an HRC member would not be "a neutral party"-that is, we would not technically be conducting formal mediation. We could, however, refer complainants to mediation

services, as long as we offered several different choices (3 or more). He was trained by the Community Dispute Settlement Program in Cambridge.

Judie asked why we would not be neutral; it is because we are empowered to make findings. We should talk further about mediation, how it's organized, whether to think about it as mediation or conciliation.

9. Programming: We have a tentative music event date and place: Sunday, March 25 in the Chenery auditorium. Fran is working to firm up arrangements with the two groups invited to perform. They will each do a 45-minute set, with a refreshment break in between. We need to pay both groups and the custodian; the total may go above the \$1000 donation the HRC received to sponsor the concert. We need to raise a bit more money.

10. Subcommittees:

a. Housing-We are trying to do an event in April, if possible, because that is Fair Housing (FH) Month. Judie will meet with Aviva Rothman-Shore (the Outreach and Policy Coordinator of the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston, who spoke at our November meeting) and will let Hildy and Kathryn know when that meeting will take place. What kind of event should this be?

Cambridge does a FH celebration every year, and Janet will find out about it. Next year, we should consider (well in advance) doing a FH poster contest in the schools. When the Fair Housing committee did this some years ago, the response was very good, and the posters were shown in store windows and bank lobbies all over Belmont.

b. Fundraising-How can we raise interest, visibility, and money for the Commission? Can we do fundraising directly, or does it have to be through a "Friends of..." organization? (One advantage of the latter is that it creates Board seats for more participants. Another advantage is the 501c (3) status making donations tax-free.)

c. The Chair asked members to review the subcommittee list and suggest additional ones and/or volunteer for others.

11. Lt. Hoerr reported several items:

a. The new Chief of Police will be Christopher Donahue.

b. The Police Department has now received all proposals for the long-awaited diversity training. It could take place in February or March. It will probably have a community component; details to follow.

c. There were two hate incidents at the High School on December 5 and 14. One involved a crudely painted swastika, the other a traffic sign with graffiti. Both were anti-Jewish. The PD believes this was done by kids. Fran contacted Principal Mike Harvey to say that the Commission's help was available to them. She will also meet with Dan Richards in the near future about Diversity Week plans.

12. Belmont resident Nan Donald spoke to the Commission about mental illness. Nan works at the Northeast Independent Living Center in Lawrence, which is funded by DMH and is a peer-run rather than clinical program. Nan is an advocate interested in the adverse side-effects of psychiatric medications.

Nan explained the terminology CSX, standing for "consumer, ex-patient, and survivor" of the mental health system. She includes herself in this group. She described the experience of being medicated by force and being denied the right to choose her treatment, despite known side effects she was experiencing.

There are issues around forced treatment (medication, electric shock therapy), use of restraints, and seclusion if treatment is resisted. Psychiatric disabilities are a complicated area vis a vis human rights, because of the tendency of others (medical and clinical personnel and the general public) to assume that CSX do not have a full grasp on reality. Their credibility is constantly in question. But in fact, many CSX are increasingly aware of the importance of choice in dealing with their illnesses. Two sayings embody this knowledge:

If it's forced, it's not treatment.

Nothing about us without us.

Nan asserted that the majority of mental illness stems from abuse situations, so that use of force re-traumatizes the person who is ill.

Speaker's suggestions for the HRC:

- a. Always look to find a kernel of truth in the descriptions and allegations of people with mental health issues.
- b. Find out about "recovery learning centers," which are being initiated in the 6 main DMH areas around the state. There will be one in the Boston area. These centers will emphasize peer counseling to get away from the crisis intervention mode. They will be open long hours and will offer a housing search component. They will focus on self-determination and help people learn to avoid hospitalization.
- c. A national group offering lots of information is NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness). Although this is more a family organization than one run by CSX, their program "In Our Own Voices" is highly recommended.
- d. Local groups to contact include M-POWER (Massachusetts People/Patients Organized for Wellness, Empowerment, and Rights) and Nan's own organization. Both groups have websites:

<http://www.madpride.org/>

<http://nilp.org/>

Members can also contact Nan to continue this discussion. She can be reached at [ndonald@nilp.org](mailto:ndonald@nilp.org) and her phone number in Belmont is 617-484-1779.

- e. Among the roles the HRC can play in regard to mental illness are: education to reduce fear and stereotyping; diversity awareness; creating opportunities to meet people dealing with mental illness; and discussion the ramifications of disclosure (even of being in treatment for MI) as an aspect of self-presentation.

The meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judie Feins